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Former Rippling employee admits to spying for rival firm Deel

By Reuters

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April 2 (Reuters) - A former employee of HR software company Rippling has confessed to spying for Deel Inc under the directive of the rival firm's CEO, an affidavit made public in an Irish court showed on Wednesday.

Rippling last month filed a lawsuit against Deel alleging racketeering, misappropriation of trade secrets, tortious interference, unfair competition, as well as aiding and abetting a breach of fiduciary duty.

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The former employee, Keith O'Brien, said he was recruited by Deel CEO Alex Bouaziz to pass on confidential information about Rippling for about 5,000 euros per month.

O'Brien, who was planning to leave Rippling to focus on his consulting business, disclosed that Bouaziz had suggested he remain at his job and become a spy for Deel.

"Alex told me he 'had an idea.' ...and I recall him specifically mentioning James Bond," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said he was asked to provide information regarding Rippling's ways of doing things, including corporate strategy, customer insights and "other interesting company information".

He added he was asked to communicate with Bouaziz's father, Deel CFO Philippe Bouaziz, regarding payments.

All communication among the three took place on messaging platform Telegram and was set to automatically delete after 24 hours.

"Alex was particularly interested in Rippling's strategies around global payroll and expansion efforts, as well as reviewing specific sales, marketing information, and customer details," O'Brien wrote.

However, Rippling eventually became aware of the espionage and set up a trap to out the spy.

An independent solicitor on March 14 served O'Brien with a court order to search his devices.

O'Brien said he turned over his laptop but was able to save his phone from inspection. He added that after he contacted Bouaziz, he was advised by Deel's lawyers to destroy his old phone.

In late March, O'Brien agreed to cooperate with Rippling's legal team as he became fearful of his safety "given the power and wealth of the individuals involved."

Reporting by Vallari Srivastava in Bengaluru; Editing by Shreya Biswas

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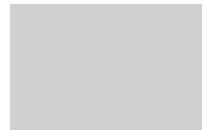
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